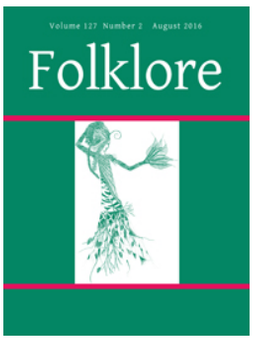

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Krivopete: Wild Women with Backward-facing Feet in Slovenian Folk Narrative Tradition

Barbara Ivančič Kutin

Abstract

This article gives an account of the Slovenian folk tradition of *krivopete*, who are supernatural female creatures with backward-facing feet. An overview of archival material, publications, and contemporary fieldwork outlines the characteristics, constants, and variables of krivopete, as well as modern folkloric transformations of the belief in these beings.

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Introduction

Krivopete are female legendary creatures, 'wild women', whose name derives from one of their physical characteristics: deformation of the feet, with the heels facing forward and the toes facing backwards (*krivo*, 'twisted'; *peta/pete*, 'heel/heels'). The Proto-Slavic **krivъ* is generated from the Indo-European base **(s)kreu̯*, which means 'to rotate, flip, bend, twist'. Originally, **pn̥tā* was most likely derived from the Indo-European root **pent-*, 'to go, walk' (Snoj 1997, 275, 493 and 440). This text uses the singular and plural forms as they appear in Slovenian: *krivopeta* (singular) and krivopete (plural).

A narrow geographical area is the home of the Slovenian krivopete folk tradition, with the creatures being known only on the far north-western edge of the Slovenian (and Slavic) ethnic area; that is, the Slovenian–Italian border (see Figures 1 and 2; numbers in the following list correspond to the map locations in Figure 2). This includes the Natisone Valleys in Slavia Friulana, where the Slovene minority in Italy resides (1); and the Livek area (2), the Breginj area (3), and the Trenta Valley (4) in Slovenia. According to Trinko, Rutar, and Mailly, they occur in Tolmin and Idrija as well (Trinko 1884; Rutar 1899; Mailly 1922). Georg Graber writes about creatures called *žalke* in Rož/Rosental and *bele vile* 'white fairies' in the Krčica Valley in Carinthia (the territory of the Slovenian minority in Austria) with similarly disfigured feet (Graber 1914).[1] Among Slovenians in the village of Korito/Coritis in Resia (Italy), stories are related of a bear (*dujak*, 'savage') with its heels facing forward and whose tracks were seen in the snow on Mount Kanin (Dapit and Kropej 1999, 10–12).

The geo-political borders of this area have changed frequently over the last 160 years. This has had an impact on the use of the Slovenian language. By 1866 part of this area (Natisone Valleys) belonged to the Venetian Republic, and the other to the Austro-Hungarian

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Figure 1. Map indicating where in Slovenia krivopete traditions are found. Adapted by Jožko Kutin from: d-maps.com/m/europa/europemax/europemax09.gif. Used with permission.

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Empire. The part that belonged to the Venetian Republic came under the Kingdom of Italy after 1866 and that is when the systematic Italianization of this area began, in tandem with emigration. After the First World War the part that previously belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire came under the Italian fascist regime, which banned the use of the Slovenian language in public, including in the civil service, in schools, and even in church; furthermore, any printing in Slovenian was also prohibited. After the Second World War the border again moved to its previous (1866) position (ES 1987, 227–35). In spite of the constant changing of governments and political boundaries over time, the inhabitants of this area formed a common cultural space. This changed dramatically after the Second World War, when the area was divided by an almost hermetically closed border between Slovenia (at that time part of Yugoslavia) and Italy. This border also represented the boundary between West (capitalist) and East (socialist or communist). The Slovenian-speaking inhabitants on the Italian side were viewed with mistrust, which

Figure 2. Map showing the locations of the Natisone Valleys, Livek area, Breginj area, and Trenta Valley. Adapted by Jožko Kutin from Google Maps. Used with permission.

resulted in a semi-military organization monitoring and intimidating them (Kozorog 2013, 141). Slovenes were without any minority rights for many years; consequently, the process of assimilation was very rapid (ES 1987, 227–35). The situation began to improve slightly with the inauguration of the first (and so far only) bilingual school in this area in 1984/85 (Gruden 1997, 375). The Protection of the Slovenian Minority in Italy Act, which provided legal recognition of the Slovenian minority, was not adopted until 2001, while the regional law, which defined minority rights in the province of Udine (which also includes the Natisone Valleys), was not adopted until 2007 (Brezigar 2010).

The difficult economic situation in the area at the end of the nineteenth century led to emigration to North and South America and to mining towns across Europe (Kalc 1997). It is in this particular area that the Isonzo Front and its hinterland were held during the First World War—at that time many people were displaced. After the war, villages and the landscape were devastated. Emigration to the lowland towns and to the industrial cities of Europe continued and reached dramatic proportions after the Second World War between 1951 and 1984. For example, in the Natisone Valleys the population

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dropped from 16,195 to 7,669 people in this period, a decline of more than fifty-two per cent (Kalc 1997, 209). The devastating earthquake of 1976, which emptied a number of mountain villages almost completely, leaving only a few elderly residents behind, also had a hand in this. Young people are few in number there; so their continuing emigration remains a problem. On the Italian side of the border, a few people have returned in recent years, seeing in this remote area with untouched nature a potential for tourism development (hiking, bicycling, culinary tourism, etc.). During the summer season they offer accommodation and catering services that are sometimes supplemented with different cultural events featuring the local cultural heritage; nowadays, the folklore of krivopete is one of the popular attractions used to encourage tourism.

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Characteristics of Krivopete and Similar Creatures

In addition to the most common denotations of twisted feet (which include *krivapete*, *krive pete*, *krivjopete*, and *krivopetnice*, with the variants depending on the local micro-dialect), other names can be found in several villages: *častitjove žene* 'venerable women' (Jagnjed/Iainich, Natisone Valleys), *skarbababa* 'toothless woman' (Čela/Cialla, Natisone Valleys), *brdovika* 'viburnum woman' (Podgora, Natisone Valleys), *šilakoša* (an untranslatable dialect word from Breginj), *baba*, *duja baba* 'wild woman' (Tolmin), *bela žena* 'white woman' (Trenta), and others.

The areas where krivopete appear are far from major urban centres, are entirely mountainous or with steep hills, and are criss-crossed with narrow gorges containing torrential streams. Krivopete live in caves, caverns, and other difficult-to-reach places, and usually near water (De Stefano 2003, 29). They live alone or in groups, and always without men of their kind (Nicoloso Ciceri 1992, 432). With the exception of their backward-facing feet (and sometimes also hands), the physical and functional characteristics of the typical krivopete overlap with the characteristics of other female legendary creatures known in the area, as well as those in the wider area of Slavic, Romanic, and Germanic culture in Central and Eastern Europe: fairies, mountain fairies, wild women, white women, *žalik žene* 'sacred women', *anguine* who have goats' hooves in place of human feet (Perusini 1946, 3), *rojenice* 'fate women', rusalkas, and sometimes even witches. Therefore, in academic literature, such as Slovenian publications on mythology, krivopete have been dealt with within the context of related female creatures such as wild women and fairies (see Kelemina 1930; Bohanec 1966, 102–103 and 109–10; Nicoloso Ciceri 1992, 432–43; Šmitek 2004; Kropej 2008, 228–29; 2012, 139, 144 and 229). The authors describe them as creatures with an ambivalent character: their knowledge and control of weather or meteorological phenomena can help people, but they are also capable of inflicting a great deal of damage and harm. Niko Kuret mentions krivopete in his monograph on Slovenian customs, pointing out that on the eve of Epiphany, krivopete would accompany *pirte* (*pehtre babe* 'perchta', another female legendary creature) when scaring children door-to-door (Kuret 1970, 272). Aldina De Stefano (2003) discusses krivopete within the context of a search for archetypal concepts of 'Mother Earth'. Some elements of the krivopete stories have been included in collections of Slovenian national fairy tales and legends (for example, Kelemina 1930, 208–11; Bohanec 1966, 15; Dolenc 1992, 45–48; Dapit and Kropej 1999, 28; Unuk 2002, 482–86).

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We find anthropomorphic creatures with their feet twisted back in folklore in many places around the world. In the fourth century BC, the Greek ethnographer Megasthenes listed wild men with backward-pointing feet as one of the wonders of India (Bernheimer 1952, 87), while in the first century AD Pliny the Elder gave an account of wild people with similar feet in the Himalayan province of Abarimon (Bostock and Riley 1890, 124). Bernard Heuvelmans and Ivan Sanderson write that such physical features appear in tales of *yetis* ('abominable snowmen') in Nepal. Larry G. Peters identifies three types of yeti in the narrative tradition: *nayalmo*, *chuty*, and *ban jakri.* These differ mainly in size, but all are hairy, similar to apes or bears, and have feet pointing backwards (Heuvelmans 1959, 134; Sanderson 1961; Peters 1997, 50 and 52). In Nepalese and East Indian folklore, we find *duncani* or *churel*, ghosts of women who died during pregnancy or childbirth, or shortly after giving birth, in the image of the lovely female who lures young men, and who is especially dangerous to her own family (Spaight 1942, 137; McClintock 1990, 44). An Armenian female demon *xəlvəlik*, who does everything in reverse order and sometimes works as a succubus, also has backward-pointing feet (Asatrian 2013, 21).

A particularly rich tradition of 'back-footed beings' is attested among the peoples of Central and South America. Caribbean folklore tells of *douens*, ghosts of children who died before they were baptized, who have feet pointing backwards (Jardim 2009, 130). On the Venezuelan island of Margarita, a *chinigua* in the form of a beautiful woman seduces men and then changes into a 'horrifying skeletal being' that causes men to fall sick and die (Lafée-Wilbert and Wilbert 2010, 29). Similar female demons include *masisikiri* in Venezuela, *siguanaba* in Guatemala, and *ciguapa* in the Dominican Republic (Lafée-Wilbert and Wilbert 2010, 50; Duran-Almarza 2012, 142). The Chorti people of Guatemala are familiar with *sisimite*; these are hairy dwarf-like (or indeed giant-like) male and female creatures with backward-pointing feet who act as the guardians of all wild animals (Kirtley 1964, 79). In eastern Paraguay and Brazil, we come across *curupira*, a nocturnal cannibalistic dwarf who presents a particular danger to women and children (Barlow 1972, 26). In Ivory Coast in West Africa, the locals talk of dwarfs with backward-pointing feet (Kirtley 1964, 81). Depictions of creatures with backward-pointing feet can, given the fact that they extend across many different parts of the world, essentially be regarded as archetypal.

According to A. T. Crawford Cree, most creatures with a deformity of the feet belong to the area bordering the human (sensuous) and spiritual world (1906, 131). For him, the deformity presented by 'back-footed beings' is not a degradation of the human form, but a remnant of the theriomorphic concept of supernatural beings: some examples point to a connection with ornithomorphic spirits (because birds have knees that are twisted in relation to human knees), meaning that a deformation of the legs is a remnant of an original 'bird-like form' (Crawford Cree 1906, 133). In contrast with Crawford Cree's diachronic thinking, Ramon Sarró believes that the universal symbolism of backward-pointing feet does not lie in atavistic remnants, but in how we imagine the rotation of the knee-cap, which can be an attribute that differentiates human from animal: if the knee is rotated, the whole leg is rotated too, not just the foot (Sarró 2008, 276). Legendary creatures that have twisted feet only are therefore somewhere in between: they belong to neither one nor the other, at least not both at the same time.

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Ljubinko Radenković also believes that legendary figures with a human shape have some distinctive feature, or an indication that they belong to another world. This distinctive feature can be manifested through an opposition in relation to the human (Radenković 2009, 168)—in the case of krivopete, therefore, through the feet being turned backwards. In the tradition of the Kuči tribe in Montenegro, for example, the devil has a twisted foot that differentiates him from human beings (Dučić 1931, 281). Monika Kropej Telban believes that the parts of the body that face the wrong way, clothing turned inside-out and upside-down, and the reverse workings of legendary creatures (such as a request for the sun to appear during a severe drought, speaking at night instead of during the day) are a sign of the reverse world of the fairies (Kropej Telban 2015a, 34; 2015c, 85). Niko Kuret defines krivopete (in addition to *vešče* 'moths', *kurenti*, *škrati* 'goblins', and others), in the narrative tradition, as a reminder of some 'lower' deity (Kuret 1980, 179). Legendary figures often play a regulatory role: they appear at times and in places with a higher risk for humans, such as dusk, the days leading up to baptism, fast days, and in caves, in forests, on water, and in swamps (Radenković 2013, 16 and 18). They also can have a regulatory impact on the behaviour of people in their role as guardians of nature or of fundamental morals; for instance, the chinigua punishes men who commit a breach of the limits of socially acceptable behaviour (Lafée-Wilbert and Wilbert 2010, 57).

Motifs of the Krivopete Legends

One of the salient features of the krivopete narrative is that the caves, caverns, rock-shelters, and so forth, in which krivopete are said to live are generally real geographical places.[2] Most of the motifs fall into the following groups: (1) krivopeta kidnaps a man; (2) a man catches a krivopeta in a split trunk and leaves her in the forest; (3) a krivopeta teaches people to do things that they do not yet know how to do; (4) a krivopeta gives advice to the ploughmen; (5) a krivopeta marries a man; and (6) a krivopeta has great wealth. Some of these tales are also about people's fear of krivopete. Some of the motifs are interwoven or appear together in the same story. In the following analysis, references to units (summaries of legends) in the Appendix are marked with the symbol #.

All accounts from Trinko's report in 1884 testify to the violent behaviour of the krivopete (abduction, deprivation of freedom, exploitation of labour), and three of the eight variants allude to cannibalism (#2, #5, #7), either explicitly or indirectly. Two of the stories end favourably for the humans involved: a boy kills a krivopeta and escapes (#2), and a grown man happily escapes after many years of exploitation (#9). Vladimir Propp believed that motifs such as cannibalism and other forms of brutality occurred when the story started to move independently of ritual, since such motifs appeared neither in beliefs themselves nor in ceremonies (Propp 2013, 99). The stories that were noted at the end of the nineteenth century show that this had already happened in the krivopete tradition. In Trinko's records, cannibalism was directly attested in three cases (#2, #5, #7), and in three others (#3, #4, #6) being eaten remains one of the two plausible ways in which the story could develop (the other was that the abductees would be retained in captivity and exploited for work, as in #8 and #9. Cannibalism is also mentioned in Rutar's version of the record (#11). The same story can be also found in Mailly's later item (#12, published in 1922). Due to almost word-for-word correspondence,

this appears to be plagiarism of Rutar's record. However, subsequent development of the krivopete tradition shows that these stories and motifs also soon started to change and disintegrate. The legend process, or life history of the legend, exhibits polarization of opinions, viewpoints, and interests of the individuals and of the society (Dégh 2001, 1).

In records of krivopete legends, we do not find a great deal of detail about the life, function, and transmission of the tradition in the community, nor is there much regarding the circumstances of storytelling. Writers mainly wrote down the location of the record and the name (and sometimes the age) of the informant. It seems likely that these changes of motifs occurred simultaneously with social, cultural, and economic changes, but as long as we possess nothing but the texts of legends, extracted from their natural environments, and lack thorough knowledge of their role in the society, all explanations remain hypothetical speculations based on inauthentic materials (Dégh 1995, 227).

According to more recent field records and publications, the krivopete broke away from acts of great cruelty: cannibalism is only mentioned in one of the items in question (#20), but even here only as an 'erroneous' interpretation on the part of some of the local people (field-survey informants). Other motifs from the most recent records match the earlier records only conditionally. Although the later stories occasionally depict human fear at meeting krivopete, because of their unusual appearance and their mysterious knowledge and abilities (#18, #20, #23, #25) they are generally more often presented as positive or neutral, rather than in any negative light: 'beautiful women who do good works' (#17); 'inclined to be favourable to humans' (#24); 'people just like us, except their legs were twisted' (#13); 'gave advice' (#21); and 'healed people' (#22). In a tale in which a well-meaning krivopeta has been asked by a woodcutter to stick her fingers into a sawn-off trunk in order to make it easier to split (the man then traps her fingers, leaves her there in pain and runs away), the human being in the story is presented as more hypocritical and cruel than the krivopeta, who simply wants to help, or asks for help from the logger to prepare wood. This motif is common in Ada Tomasetig's material, appearing in nine of the forty-seven tales about krivopete (Tomasetig 2010).

Humans are also shown to be more brutal and more inclined towards blackmail in those stories in which a krivopeta is caught and not released until she teaches her captors the things she knows. This motif is well known in the Natisone Valleys and the Livek and Breginj areas: the krivopeta would teach people how to make cheese, cottage cheese, and butter; how to spin wool, knit, sharpen a scythe, and how to make sausages and sweets. However, after she is released, she runs away and from a safe distance yells out the things she did not teach them, such as what the whey contains, how to make sugar, or how to bake sweets (#21, #24; Tomasetig 2010, 63). In the Trenta Valley, this motif is not connected to krivopete but to the 'wild man' (*divji mož*): he would teach people how to make cheese and cottage cheese from milk. After his release, he shouts, again from a distance, that the best thing is the whey (see Dolenc 1992, 49). According to Monika Kropej, the figures of the krivopeta and divji mož allude (and here they provide a 'transmission of knowledge' function) to the ancient relations between aborigines and immigrants (Kropej 2008, 231), as do the tales of *gejdi* (giants) which are also well known in this area (Matičetov 1975, 183–84).

Another common motif is that of krivopete giving advice to tillers on how to fix a broken plough or tie a bundle properly: they should help the process along 'with good

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intentions' or turn the vine upside-down (#19). Tomasetig has compiled eleven stories containing this motif (Tomasetig 2010). A common feature of all variants of this motif is that the advice is given in rhyme; due to the lexical and phonological diversity of the local dialects in question, these rhymes differ from village to village. Moreover, the language of the krivopete is a kind of pidgin, differing from the speech of the local people. The 'wild man' also comes to the aid of people in the Idrija and Cerkno areas using the same semi-comprehensible speech and in the same situations (Ivančič Kutin 2013b, 13). This is consistent with the finding that legendary beings have their own way of speaking or their own language (Dapit and Kropej 1999, 5).

With the motif of the marriage of a krivopeta and a man (a young man or a widower with small children), the course of the story through time and space is very similar. Happiness in the marriage is over when a man breaks the taboo by mentioning her physical deformities to her and calling (i.e. insulting) her with her real name (Kropej 2008, 233).

Tomasetig transcribed eight stories containing this motif. The conflict is generally associated with a premature harvest: after a storm that destroys the harvest of all the neighbours in the village, the man realizes his mistake, but prays for forgiveness in vain. His wife, even after her departure, secretly cares for her child or children (#15; Tomasetig 2010, 40); in some variants, she tutors the girl in the skills required of women (Tomasetig 2010, 50–51). In the Trenta variant the husband even manages to get the wife back (#15). In none of the later variations does the krivopeta harm her children, as she does in Trinko's note (#7). These marriage motifs are very common in international 'fairy wife' stories and Slovenian folklore is not an exception (Kropej Telban 2015c).

In the Breginj area we often find the motif of the wealth held by a krivopeta (#20, #26), and in the Trenta Valley, an area of high mountains, we find the motif of the krivopeta shepherdess who owns herds of wild goats, sometimes also in combination with riches (#16, #17, #24).

The tradition has had an influence on re-creation in literature and vice versa, the literature having contributed to the transmission of the tradition in the wider area and to its popularization. In the variant noted in the Trenta Valley, and in a literary reworking published by Zorčeva (1985), we find a new combination of motifs: a krivopete tale provides the framework for the story of the golden-horned chamois (*zlatorog*). The tale was first recorded in 1868 by Karel Dežman. On the basis of this text, Rudolf Baumbach wrote the epic *Zlatorog* (Goldhorn) (1877), which helped to make the legend a highly visible and well-known one (Kropej 2008, 121 and 124). The legend of Goldhorn contains *bele žene* 'white women', described by Dežman thus: 'The "white women" of the Slovenes, also called *rojenice* "fate women", are fairies who play an important role in Serbian and Bulgarian folk songs and tales' (Kropej 2008, 123). Nowhere in Dežman's notes is there any indication that these 'white women' would have had twisted feet (i.e. that they are in fact krivopete), as is the case in Zorčeva's version. However, twisted feet are such a strong feature that they would surely have been mentioned explicitly in the tales! One of Zorčeva's versions from the Bovec region ends with a motif that is relatively widespread across different tales: a problem that is to be solved by a saviour who will rock in a cradle made of spruce from a tree that will only grow at a specific location (e.g. Dolenc 1992,

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118). This motif of 'Salvation in the Cradle' is listed under ATU 760*** (Uther 2004, 421), with Friederich Ranke writing about its prevalence in Europe in 1911 (see Kropej 2015b).

None of the Slovenian tales gives any detailed reasons for the krivopeta's twisted feet. This feature is mostly referred to simply as a self-evident fact, and only in a small handful of variants is mention made of the fact that this helps to throw a stalker off the scent, or that they were simply badly created. A tale told by the Gurung people of Nepal gives one explanation for the twisted feet: women who died in childbirth were unlucky ghosts wandering the mountains trying to help their orphan children. God turned their feet the other way so they would no longer be able to return to life. As in Zorčeva's Trenta story (#24), where the young hunter was the son of a krivopeta, they lived at high altitude and owned a mythical horned animal (Kozinc 2014, 23 and 24).[3]

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Krivopete in Written Sources

If we arrange material on krivopete chronologically, we can see the dynamics of the records and publications, as well as the impact of earlier sources on subsequent ones; this also provides us with an overview of changes to or preservation of motif frameworks. The summaries in the Appendix present almost all of the pre-1959 collected material. Due to the growing abundance of material after 1985, only selected units containing new substantive elements or motifs are included.

The earliest known mention of krivopete dates to the second half of the eighteenth century: botanist Karel Zois (1756–99), an explorer of the Alpine natural world, reported that his local guides were sure that krivopetnice were living in the Triglav Lakes Valley (Kozinc 2014, 23).

Further reference to krivopete can be found in the material of the Polish-Russian linguist Jan Baudouin de Courtenay who was researching Slavic languages and their dialects in the last third of the nineteenth century. He mentioned them in his notes of the town of San Pietro al Natisone in Friuli-Venezia Giulia (Italy) in 1873 (the material was not published until 1988). Krivopete from San Pietro play a role traditionally belonging to witches: they bring hail (Matičetov 1988, 224–25; see #1).

Catholic priest Ivan Trinko looked in detail at the krivopeta tradition in Slavia Friulana in Friuli-Venezia Giulia. Concerned that the Slovenian language and narrative tradition were under threat among the Slovenes in Italy, he published an article, 'Divje žene ali krivjopete' (Wild women or krivjopete), in the *Ljubljanski zvon* newspaper in 1884. He noticed that the krivopete tradition was unique, known only in certain villages of Slavia Friulana. He surmised that a belief in these creatures was no longer present (as it had apparently been rooted out by the priests), but that 'young people are avoiding the caves in which [krivopete] lived even today' (Trinko 1884, 230). Eight stories about krivopete are described briefly in Trinko's article as he remembered them from his childhood (Trinko 1884, 229–32; #2–#9). Simon Gregorčič Jr, who served as a vicar in Trenta, reported on krivopete under the pseudonym 'P-ov' in the same year as Trinko. The transcript shows that even adults were afraid of krivopete. The cause of their fear is not clearly stated (Gregorčič 1884, 311; #19). In his 1893 book about the Slovenes in Slavia Friulana, Francesco Musoni mentioned that his aunt, who came from the region, had told him awful things about creatures with inverted feet. She called them *bradovike* or krivopete

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(Musoni 1893, 13). More about the krivopete was written in 1899 by the historian Simon Rutar in a section on language and folk tradition in the western reaches of Slovenian in Slavia Friulana. He described their appearance, their character traits, and the pattern of their behaviour: with their knowledge of the weather, they helped people to harvest crops before storms, but in the meantime they kidnapped their children (Rutar 1899, 91–92; #11). Anton von Mailly published a story about these wild women who lived in a cave in the hills of Idrija in 1922, as told by Marija Pivk from Idrija. They supposedly had their feet and hands twisted (Mailly 1922, 38; see #12). Mailly's report is very reminiscent of Rutar's.

In the following decades (up until 1985), krivopete can be traced only in certain collections of Slovenian narrative tradition—only Trinko's old material is published there (e.g. Kelemina 1930, 208–11; Bohanec 1966, 102). A review of the archives shows that the tradition among the people, however, had not disappeared entirely. Folklorist Milko Matičetov recorded four items on krivopete in the Trenta Valley in 1952 and 1959 (#14–#17). Pavle Merkù systematically documented the folkloric traditions of the Slovenes in Italy between 1965 and 1974, publishing them in an extensive monograph. It is surprising to see that the entirety of his writings contains only one tiny note on krivopete, where he states that the meaning and the material are not entirely clear: 'An informant relates only that krivopeta was a shepherdess who used to call rocks goats' (Merkù 1976, 331). Also among the narrative material collected by Lea D'Orlandi we can find only one short tale—krivopeta harvested all of the grain and then left her husband after he called her 'krivapeta' (D'Orlandi 1964, 25–25). However, in about the same period, more material on krivopete was collected on the Slovenian side of the border in the Breginj and Livek areas by students of Professor Janez Dolenc; some of these legends about krivopete were later published in a book entitled *Zlati Bogatin*[4] (Golden Bogatin) (Dolenc 1992; #18–#22). Ada Tomasetig also included two stories about krivopete in a collection of thirty of the fairy tales and legends that were told in her family in the village of Sarženta/Sorzento in the Natisone Valleys (Tomasetig 1981; #22, #23).

An illustrated book telling the 'Krivopetnice and Goldhorn' narrative was published in 1985. Svetka Zorčeva claims that she wrote the story with locals in Trenta, which is why it has been included in the following review despite the fact that it is a literary interpretation (Zorčeva 1985). The story includes details that had previously been mentioned by Gregorčič, Zois, and Matičetov (#10, #14, #15). However, Zorčeva's story about krivopete is simply a framework for a love story about a hunter from Trenta (#25). This publication has had a significant impact on knowledge of the character of krivopete in the local area and the wider Slovenian area.

Aldina De Stefano recorded a number of narratives and memories in the Natisone Valleys and included them in her book (De Stefano 2003). Ada Tomasetig gathered over five hundred items of traditional Slovenian narrative among the Slovenes in the Natisone Valleys in Friuli-Venezia Giulia (Italy) in her book *Od Idrije do Nediže* (From the Idria River to the Natisone River): among them were forty-seven items on krivopete (Tomasetig 2010, 31–70). Multiple narratives and fragments dealing with krivopete (such as #26) have also been documented in a field study that took place as part of the ZborZbirk (Collection of Collections) project (Ledinek Lozej and Peče 2014) in the northern Slovenian–Italian border area between 2013 and 2015.

There were very few sources between Rutar's 1899 description of krivopete and Zorčeva's literary reworking of 1985 (if we ignore Mailly's work from 1922, which is almost identical to Rutar's); moreover, most of these sources were difficult to access. The editors of collections of Slovenian narrative traditions and writers of surveys of Slovenian mythology have relied solely on the publications of Trinko and Rutar and, on occasion, those of Musoni and Mailly. The political and social situation in the first half of the twentieth century (two world wars, fascist dictatorship, mass emigration, etc.) made it difficult to record and publish on the narrative traditions in the western part of Slovenian ethnic territory. The material documented by Matičetov in the 1950s was not accessible until 2014, while Dolenc's material, documented between 1957 and 1988, was published in part in 1992 (his handwritten private archive has been accessible only since 2012; a small part of this material was published in Ivančič Kutin 2013a). The largest body of material on krivopete, forty-seven items collected in the field over more than thirty years by Ada Tomasetig, has been accessible only since 2010. Substantially more sources are available for any new examination of the krivopete traditions today.

Distribution and Vitality of the Tradition

It appears that the area in which krivopete are/were known to the narrative tradition has shrunk over time. Rutar (1899) writes that *duje babe*, 'wild women', of the Tolmin area are actually krivopete, with the same backward-pointing feet (and occasionally with backward-pointing hands as well). Janez Dolenc's archive material contains a great quantity of tales of duje babe in Tolmin. He later published sixteen tales in the book *Zlati Bogatin* (Dolenc 1992, 16–40); but in none of the variants does the duja baba have feet that point backwards. Moreover, none of the material examined, nor any enquiries made in the field in the Tolmin, Cerkno, or Idrija areas over the last three years, have yielded any evidence of the existence of this tradition in the area. This raises a number of issues, of course, chiefly regarding Rutar's sources (not a great deal can be gleaned about this from his material). However, we must bear in mind that legends adapt to the rule that the chain is only as strong as its weakest link. One single mistake in the chain of transmission can change, or indeed completely stop, the entire folkloric process (Dégh 2001, 414).

Concerning the archival and published material (mostly by Tomasetig) and contemporary field research, we can conclude that the krivopete tradition is still very much alive today in the Natisone Valleys in Italy, and can still be found in the Breginj and Livek areas, while there have been no new records in Trenta since Zorčeva's findings, and it no longer appears to exist in the Tolmin or Idrija areas. The difference in the levels of preservation and present-day vitality of the tradition between the Slovenian and Italian sides of the border is striking. Awareness of ethnic identity among Slovenes in Italy has strengthened due to the threats to the existence of the Slovenian language there. People have more consciously cultivated and preserved the original language and other traditions (Kalc 1997, 210), but this has taken place primarily within the family. Only in recent times—the minority in this area having been given a statutory basis for the protection of its rights—has this also become visible externally; that is, the village community itself has taken care of the preservation of traditions. Some expatriates (or their descendants) on the Italian side have rebuilt their homes after the earthquake in

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1976, and they have been returning to their home villages during the summer holidays. Pensioners are the ones, above all, who have been returning to these villages from abroad or from cities on the plain on a more permanent basis; they are the main informants included in contemporary field research. They tell stories or fragments of krivopete tradition as they remember it from the stories told to them by elderly locals during their childhood.

The tradition of krivopete is deeply rooted in the dialect of the entire area in the form of small sayings and threats, e.g. 'You are/look like a krivopeta' to someone who is interested in herbs or looks like he has lived for some time in a cave or a forest (dishevelled, untidy); or 'Be careful not to be taken away by the krivopete' as a threat to a naughty, disobedient child. These forms are, however, found mainly in the language of the elderly population (see also #17, #26). On the Italian side of the border, toponyms such as *Krivapetna jama* 'Krivopeta's cave' are used and are also registered on geographical maps. When asked about krivopete in the field, informants often express a distance from the tradition with statements such as: 'It is a complete invention. They were just scaring us when we were kids!'[5]

Krivopete in Contemporary Culture

In the last few years the tradition, character, and name of krivopete have appeared in a wide variety of different contexts. In addition to numerous printed publications, the krivopete tradition has a strong online presence and features in numerous public events. The aforementioned illustrated book by Svetka Zorčeva (1985, summary #24) takes a great deal of the credit for initiating a broader understanding of krivopete on the Slovenian side of the border, and has brought the name 'krivopetnica' to young readers and their teachers. The text is also frequently the basis for interpretation and further creative work. Ada Tomasetig's book (2010) has performed a similar popularizing function on the Italian side.

Individual tales of krivopete can be heard at increasingly numerous and popular storytelling events and venues, and are also found in children's puppet shows (which are part of the tourist offerings of Triglav National Park in Trenta—the performance's story is a variant of Zorčeva's text; see #24),[6] in local drama performances for adults, in poetry (see Kanzian 2010), in music,[7] and in art (see Figure 3).

In 2004 the local drama club in Trenta included a krivopeta story (a variant of #15) as a side scene in a performance of *Dekle iz Trente* (The Lass from Trenta) in which the village assembly talks about the old times. The contemporary forms and interpretations of the tradition include the storytelling event for adults that takes place on the evening prior to 1 November (the Feast of All Saints) in the village of Srednje (Stregna) and the Natisone Valleys.[8] Each event features three or four storytellers from the area, in addition to Ada Tomasetig. They are usually between sixty and seventy-five years old and, for most of them, this is their first public appearance. They tell simple stories the way they heard them in their home environment from their ancestors, elderly fellow villagers, and so on. A krivopete story always features in these events, usually with the motif of marriage to a man. The event takes place in the village pub in front of an audience of twenty to thirty adults of varying ages, mostly locals from Srednje and its environs. If there

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Figure 3. Krivopeta. Wooden sculpture by Stefano Comelli (2005). The statue stands in the window of one of the houses in Matajur/Montemaggiore, Slavia Friulana, Italy. Photograph by the author (2015).

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are people in the audience who no longer understand Slovenian (they generally know each other), the storytelling takes place bilingually (in the local Slovenian dialect and in Italian). The storytellers occasionally jump from one language to another even within one story. Historical Slovenian autumn dishes are served during the event by the owners of the pub.

Krivopete also appear in various tourist promotional materials: from walking trails and guided tours, where one can see and experience their living habitat (caves, woods, paths, stones), to providers of accommodation and catering services[9] and cuisine.[10] There are also cross-border projects, such as Study Circles (Rejec 2014). Also, primary-school children are devoting more and more time to local traditions in their project work. In Breginj, for example, pupils, in collaboration with Planika, the local milk-processing factory, prepared proposals for new names for the company's dairy products associated with stories from their local traditions: a cottage cheese with herbs has been named 'Krivopeta' (Učenci 2015). The krivopete tradition is consciously being used and consumed as a symbol of local culture in order to achieve various economic, educational, or cultural-artistic interests and objectives, and is being adapted to those interests and objectives; that is, in the function of 'folklorism' (Šmidchens 1999, 64). Linda Dégh points out that it is necessary to recognize what an important role the creation and dissemination of legends play in the society that creates and disseminates them. Legends as a traditional folklore genre are

attractive empty formulas, to be filled with the meaning—this enables different uses and also abuses (Dégh 2001, 5).

Conclusion

The present article extracts the fundamental characteristics of the krivopete traditions and their most common motifs, and searches for parallels with other traditions known in this environment. The most noticeable change from the point of view of the motifs is that, over time, the krivopeta lost her extreme cruelty. At the end of the nineteenth century, most of the stories referred directly or indirectly to cannibalism; this motif seems to have subsequently disappeared, with krivopete often being shown in a positive light, despite their mystique and their sometimes daunting physical appearance (they help and teach people, they are friendly).

This article also gives a chronological overview of sources and selected materials on krivopete from the end of the nineteenth century to the present day, and shows the variable numbers of records from different time periods and the distribution of these records in the extreme north-west of Slovenian ethnic territory. Just as it appeared that the tradition was falling into oblivion, at the turn of the millennium it was revived once again via publications and other forms of communication.

Since the arrival of mass media, storytelling has begun to lose its former social function, becoming something 'for children only'; and contemporary concepts of child-rearing have, in turn, made stories of cruelty aimed at children socially unacceptable. The ongoing conscious integration of various traditions into local cultural and tourist marketing—one reason why the krivopete are experiencing a revival in the form of folklorism—has contributed to the less daunting, even friendly, image of these legendary figures.

Slovenian folklore tradition on krivopete complements a global roster of female supernatural creatures with twisted feet which appear in many different parts of the world; suggesting that this kind of being is archaic and even archetypal. As a result of the many shared specifics, this common tradition is certainly worth further comparative research from folkloristic, anthropological, and other cultural-historical aspects.

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Appendix

Summarized stories are marked with the sign * in the citation information.

#1: '*Krivapeta*, pl. *krivapete*, one that brings hail. And then, when they heard the bells ringing at St Lenart/St Leonardo, one said to the others: "Go, go! The Dogs of St Lenart are barking."' (Baudouin de Courtenay 1988, 74–75; translation by Joel Smith).

#2: Krivjopete steal a boy and force-feed him, even with hazelnuts and walnuts, to fatten him up so that he can be eaten. One day the krivjopeta who is in charge of cooking is ordered to make him ready for dinner. The boy realizes that the krivjopeta intends to kill him with the lid of the chest in which the nuts are kept, so he refuses to bend over. When the krivjopeta bends over instead of him, the boy closes the lid, kills her, and runs back home (Trinko 1884, 230*).

#3: Two young shepherds lose their cows. Krivjopete lure them deep into the woods by imitating the cows' mooing and kidnap them (Trinko 1884, 231*).

#4: A young girl encounters a krivjopeta at the well and never returns home (Trinko 1884, 231*).

#5: A fat old man is tempted by a krivjopeta with promises of wealth and treasure. The old man follows her, but in reality the krivjopeta is glad that she has captured such plump prey (Trinko 1884, 231*).

#6: A tailor is kidnapped by krivjopete and is promised his freedom if half of his ten children are brought to them. He fails to keep his promise and their threat comes true—they burn down his house with all his family inside (Trinko 1884, 231*).

#7: A young krivjopeta marries a young man, but when her husband calls her 'krivjopeta', she takes their children and leaves him. She apparently eats the children in revenge (Trinko 1884, 231*).

#8: A man serves a group of krivjopete from a young age. One day he is allowed to leave to visit his home. He is given a bag that contains a rich prize, but is not allowed to open it until he arrives home. The man's curiosity gets the better of him and he looks inside the bag on the way home. The treasure turns into charcoal (Trinko 1884, 231*).

#9: A man serves a group of krivjopete for a long time, but one day has had enough. While chopping wood with an axe, he saws off the trunk and asks a krivjopeta to keep the crack together with her hands, saying that he has nothing to spike it with. When this is done, the man pulls out his axe to catch her fingers and runs home happily (Trinko 1884, 232*).

#10: 'Krivopetnice live in Trenta, in the Valley of Zadnjica under Mount Triglav. Their legs are twisted backwards, the heel facing to the front and their toes turned backwards. A man in his fifties was afraid to go there, saying that the krivopetnice might get him. He followed them when they were walking around there' (Gregorčič 1884, 311; translation by Joel Smith).

#11: Krivjopete or *duje* (wild) women are shrews and are also known near Tolmin under the name of *duga* (the wild). They used to live in the caves and had long green hair that covered their shoulders and backs. They typically had feet with the heels facing forward and toes turned back. Their palms were also turned back. They used to scare people at night and also made themselves visible during the day, especially before storms and bad weather. They used to sit on high rocks observing the people below, commenting

on natural forces and warning them about their forthcoming ruin. Double payment was required for such warnings.

One summer's day, when the corn was yellow and ripe, krivjopete appeared from their caves and started yelling: 'Harvest the grain, the hail is coming!' There wasn't even the slightest sign of a storm. When people rushed to harvest their crops, krivjopete raided their houses and took all their children into their caves. They gave nuts and other food to children to fatten them because they were feeding on human flesh. Adult men were sometimes also lured to chop their wood and work around the house. Various knowledge and secrets were disclosed, but these could on no account be told to anyone else: their punishments were heavy, burning the traitor's house and destroying his family. Even nowadays, local people in Slavia Friulana can point out many caverns in which krivjopete apparently lived (Rutar 1899, 91–92*).

#12: Their hair was bushy and they had their hands and feet turned backwards. That is why people called them krivopete. They used to watch the farmers at work from the rocks nearby. Once, they sent them to harvest wheat and, in the meantime, stole their children, who were then taken to their caves. They fattened them up with nuts and ate them afterwards. Only the smallest one was left and was taught a variety of secrets and domestic tasks (Mailly 1922, 38*).

#13: 'Krivopetnice used to wear the skins of dead animals: the hairy parts were turned inwards to keep them warm. They brought wood to their homes and lit the fire. Embers were tucked into the ashes. They occasionally roasted the meat of the wild animals or sheep. They removed the offal, put the cattle on a long stick and roasted it. It was half bloody and half raw. They lived on meat and roots. They were people like us, just that their feet were twisted backwards' (MMTZ 1952; translation by Joel Smith).

#14: 'Krivepetnce had their heels in front and toes in the back of their feet. They could be found in Zadnjica under the Yellow Rock (*Rumena skala*) and used to breed chamois. When they saw the hunters, they would say: "There's a landslide and the hunters are below the Yellow Rock." "Ha," one of them would say: "What shall we give them?" "Oh, let's give them that lame goat." And the hunters said: "Kill that lame chamois! Let's go back!" If this was true . . . ' (MMTZ 1959; translation by Joel Smith).

#15: 'There was a man who courted a krivopetnica. He asked her to marry him. She said: "If you never call me krivopetnica, I'll take you. If you call me that, I won't." They married and lived together. They had a child, a boy. The husband was at work and she was at home alone. She used to know in advance when a storm was coming. She harvested all the grain and put it in the attic. When the husband returned home, he noticed it and got angry with her, saying: "You damned krivopetnica!" She left him and the child for good. Then the wind and hail came down and devastated everything—but she had already stowed the food away in the attic. When the husband saw it, he asked himself what to do. He went to the vicar to seek his advice, but the vicar could no longer help him. He visited the bishop, but even he couldn't help. At last he went to see the Pope. The Pope asked him whether he still had the wedding belt—because she was still secretly breastfeeding the baby. His advice was: "When she comes, put the belt around her waist and pull her to you. If you can hold her, she will be yours; if not, then I can't help you!" And sure enough, she came to breastfeed the baby. He threw the belt around her waist and he could barely hold her. Then he asked her to forgive him' (MMTZ 1959; translation by Joel Smith).

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#16: 'A shepherd crossed the forest with his animals and headed below Mount Triglav. Embers were still left over from the krivopetnice's cooking. He took a piece of charcoal and put it in his pipe. Upon his arrival home, the piece of charcoal turned into gold! He returned but the embers were gone' (MMTZ 1959; translation by Joel Smith).
#17: 'Krivopetnice lived in Klinca, where the wild goats were grazing. Hunters saw them: beautiful, well-meaning women. They used to bring salt to the chamois. If one of them fell sick, they treated it with herbs. They used to dance and sing. It was very nice to hear them singing. A spruce grows in Triglav . . . [a small part of the text is illegible here] . . . this tree (a spruce) was cut down, a crib was made out of it and the one [the one in the crib?] will save the treasure in Triglav' (MMTZ 1959; translation by Joel Smith).
#18: 'Women who were called krivepete used to live in the village of Lokarji (v Krasih). They got their name because their toes were placed where their heels were supposed to be and vice versa. They were spinning wool. They were spinning and spinning and, all of a sudden, one said: "Finish!"And at this moment, the wool ripped, they stopped spinning and they all disappeared. It was also said that they used to hunt children. That is why even nowadays elderly people often say to children: "Just wait until krivopeta comes to get you!"' (DAJD, recorded by Hrast Silvana, Borjana, Breginj area 1977/78; translation by Joel Smith).
#19: 'Once upon a time, krivopete or wild women, lived under Lokarji. Down in Laz, a man called Menič was ploughing the field with a wooden plough, which broke. He was tying it with hazel twine, but the plough kept breaking. Up in the Ogranjca, there were krivopete and they were yelling at him:"Wi, wi trto nərobt, d bo stanobt" ["Twist the vine in the opposite direction so it will last longer"]' (DAJD, recorded by Žuber Mira, Borjana, Breginj area, 1977/78; translation by Joel Smith).
#20: 'There was a cave called Kocova close to Napoleon's Bridge near Podbela. Krivapeta made herself visible, like some kind of witch, only on sunny days. She used to say: "Dig, dig, and you will be rich!" And people really were digging. They found a chipped yellow stone there. Because they thought it was gold, they dug further until a large hole had been excavated. Water was found below this cave and a digger fell into it, never to return. From then on, nobody dared go to the cave as it was said that whoever came along would be eaten by krivapeta. There were also rumours that krivapeta was very rich. A man saw her counting her money. After the money had been counted, she put it back in Kocova Cave, but she ran out of space for all the money. She had to dig another hole. This one is next to Kocova Cave' (DAJD, recorded by Rosič Silvana, Logje, Breginj area, 1976/77; translation by Joel Smith).
#21: 'Krivopete used to live above Livek in Malenšče. They got their name after their feet, which were turned backwards. At times they came closer to the people to give them advice. They were singing to a man called Žluder when his yoke broke: "Cut the vine contrary-wise so it will stay stable forever" ("Ureži trto barobek, da bo stala trdno vek"). They also knew what kind of weather was coming and could advise on when to sow and when to pick crops. People wanted to know more, so they captured one of them. They promised to release her when she revealed her knowledge to them. She taught them how to make butter and cheese. When she was released, she said: "If you had carried on keeping me captive, I would have told you what whey contains." After that time, krivopete were no longer seen, and they moved to the Trenta area. People were sorry

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because they had left' (DAJD, recorded by Zvonko Perat, Livek 1961/62; translation by Joel Smith).

#22: In the village of Marsin/Mersino, a krivapeta was yelling at night, asking for a bucket or a cup to drink water out of at the sink. A woman came out of the house and gave her a strainer. Because the krivapeta was unable to pour water into it, she called the woman out of bed. The woman did not return for a long time and her husband went to see where she was. He found that she had been roughed up. Since then, nobody in that house played tricks on anyone (Tomasetig 1981, 53*).

#23: People who were shepherding a flock high in the hills used to watch krivapete wash their twisted feet. A man from Barnas/Vernasso once caught one of them sleeping. He tied her up and took her to the village. She promised to teach the people everything she knew if they released her. She taught them to make butter, cottage cheese, and cheese, bake bread from corn flour, knit baskets, sew shoes, and sharpen the scythe. She said that this was all she knew and they let her go. However, when she was already far away, she cried: 'I have taught you everything except how to make sweets!' Even today, the people of Barnas do not know how to make sweets (Tomasetig 1981, 49 and 50*).

#24: Mountain fairies—krivopetnice used to live at Presek, Klin, and Pihavec. Their feet were turned backwards. They were fond of the people in Trenta, but they did not like to be seen. They used to warn them about the weather and the chores they had to do. They possessed huge treasures in the Pihavec and Bogatin mountains. They shepherded chamois, and herds were led by a strong goat with golden horns called Goldhorn. A young man from Trenta fell in love with a krivopetnica. He asked her to marry him. She agreed on one condition: that he would never call her a krivopetnica. He promised it with all his heart. Then they lived happily and a boy was born to them. Then one day the husband went away from home. His wife took a scythe and cut down all the potato plants (she knew that disaster was imminent and that it would destroy the whole crop, which had just started to bloom). When the husband returned home and saw what she had done, he became terribly angry and called her a krivopetnica. She left immediately. But because she was coming back to breastfeed her son, the husband took the advice of an old woman from Trenta and caught her with the wedding belt. The krivopetnica died very soon after that. Her son grew into a great hunter. He was the darling boy of the krivopetnice in the mountains. They used to protect him until, because of his love for a conceited innkeeper's daughter, he shot at Goldhorn, whose horn was supposed to open the doors to the treasure. The wounded Goldhorn threw him into the abyss and the young man died. The krivopetnice and Goldhorn left the mountains of Trenta. The people of the area asked them to stay, but to no avail. To comfort them, they told them that so much gold was left in Pihavec that a thick golden chain could be forged from it long enough to be wrapped around the mountain of Pihavec three times. In the steepest wall of Mount Triglav, a spruce would grow in a hundred and a hundred and a hundred years from then. A man who would not go to the mountains for hunting but for the sake of beauty would pass by. The spruce would be cut down and a cradle made out of it. A hero who would find and save the treasure would be rocked in this cradle. Then good things would happen once again to the people of Trenta, and they would no longer have to roam the world for their daily bread (Zorčeva 1985*).

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#25: 'People said that when it is dark, it is not permissible to go out. They said: "Krivopete will come and take you by the hand and you will disappear. [They] will take you to the Nadiža/Natisone River, you will be drowned and the water will take you away to Ter/Pradielis." [I] was afraid to go near the water trough to take the water. They lived in Osunc above Španjud, there are caverns, streams, and springs. In those caves there is where krivopete lived' (Tomasetig 2010, 31; translation by Doris Sattler).
#26: 'Krivapete lived near the river Nadiža (Natisone) on Gradac near village Logje in Breginj area. Their heels faced forwards. They were good and used to help people. They set up a rope that they used to dry money on. Once, however, the wind blew all the money away. After that they disappeared, never to be seen again in Gradac. These were the tales that circulated among the people. That is what they used to believe' (ZZAR, Logje, Breginj area, 2015; translation by Joel Smith).

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Notes

[1] This research is focused only on the territory at the Slovenian and Italian border (Figure 1). Precise research into the folklore of krivopete among the Slovenian minority in Austria has not yet been done.

[2] It would be worthwhile to make a map with all locations where krivopete are reputed to live. This map would illustrate abundance and distribution, and perhaps even give an indication of the focal point of this tradition, which might in turn encourage further research into the cultural-historical and perhaps even medical reasons for the emergence or presence of the krivopete tradition in this particular area. Archaeological research at these locations could yield interesting answers.

[3] The source does not mention the name of the spirit. It is probably a duncani or churel ghost (see Spaight 1942, 137; McClintock 1990, 44).

[4] *Bogatin* is the name of the mountain in the Slovenian Julian Alps and means 'rich man'.

[5] For example, in interviews (all done by Barbara Ivančič Kutin): Jože Terlikar, Logje, Breginj area, 28 March 2015; Maria Gilda Primosig, Clodig, Natisone Valleys, 21 July 2014; and Anton Hosner, Trenta Valley, 14 August 2014.

[6] www.tnp.si/images/uploads/Kulturni_bazar_letak_TNP.pdf (8 March 2013).

[7] www.rhapsody.com/artist/arcana/album/tracks (January 1993; see track 13, 'Ena Krivapeta').

[8] The organizer is the Slovenian cultural centre (two employees), which is engaged in preserving culture within the Slovenian minority in Italy and has its headquarters in San Pietro al Natisone.

[9] http://krivapeteland.blogspot.com/2014/04/blog-post.html

[10] http://invitoapranzo.lv3.it/wp-content/uploads/2014/libretto/libertto_2014.pdf

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